

Chapter 1: Introduction / Purpose

1.0 Introduction and Purpose

At the beginning of the 21st Century, Yellowstone County and the City of Billings are positioned to lead Montana into a new era of economic, social and educational achievement. The Yellowstone County and City of Billings 2003 Growth Policy is about making the right choices to shape that leadership and the future of our community. During the public involvement process our citizens indicated those choices must take place in an environment of cooperation—including better communication, partnerships, collaboration and participation—within our community.

Our choice is not whether we grow, but how well we will grow. The general vision for our community is one where there is a quality of life that attracts people who have capital, skills, knowledge, and creativity. Our community should ideally offer a wide range of opportunities to live, work, learn and play. We agree we want our children to find future jobs here so they remain in our community. We value our trails, parks and green space. We support an attractive, efficient, economically vibrant community that is safe. There is significant community consensus on these matters.

The 2003 Growth Policy does not stand alone. It is founded on completed plans and policies already accepted by Yellowstone County and the City of Billings such as the West Billings Plan, the Billings Urban Area Transportation Plan 2000, the Parks2020

Plan, and the Bicycle Plan for the greater Billings area. The Growth Policy is framed by the many meetings and forums in both Billings and Yellowstone County over the last two years that are detailed in the Community Involvement section of the Policy.

In 1990, when the last Growth Policy was adopted (then called the Comprehensive Plan), the Internet was in its infancy, use of Geographical Information Systems (GIS) by local governments was virtually unknown, the USSR was still a viable world power, and computers were just beginning to be used in the home. Remarkable changes have occurred in resource development and with information sharing and distribution since that time. During the development of this new Growth Policy, advantage has been taken of the Yellowstone County GIS for mapping and data query, as well as utilizing digital information in all forms, such as the 2000 Census and the state Natural Resource Information System.



The purpose of the Yellowstone County and the City of Billings 2003 Growth Policy is to guide local officials and community members in making decisions that will affect the future of our community. The Growth Policy directs basic policy choices and provides a flexible framework for adapting to real conditions over time. It is a collection of the goals and objectives for the community. Future actions that will be based on the goals, objectives and policies in the 2003 Growth Policy include revision of the City and County subdivision regulations, revision of the Unified Zoning Code, implementation of the West Billings Plan, capital budgeting and provision of services to the community.

Regulatory Requirements

Since 1990, the Montana State Legislature has revised Title 76, governing Land Resources and Use, of the Montana Code Annotated (MCA) to require more specific information. Previously called Comprehensive Plans, and currently, Growth Policies, the following elements are now required by state law:¹

1. Community goals and objectives
2. Information describing an inventory of the existing characteristics and features of the jurisdictional area, including land uses, population, housing needs, economic conditions, local services, public facilities, natural resources, other characteristics and features proposed by the planning board and adopted by the governing bodies
3. Projected trends for the life of the growth policy for each of the following elements: land use; population; housing needs; economic conditions; local services; natural resources; and other elements proposed by the planning board and adopted by the governing bodies
4. A description of policies, regulations, and other measures to be implemented in order to achieve the goals and objectives above

5. A strategy for development, maintenance, and replacement of public infrastructure, including drinking water systems, wastewater treatment facilities, sewer systems, solid waste facilities, fire protection facilities, roads, and bridges
6. An implementation strategy that includes:
 - a) a timetable for implementing the growth policy;
 - b) a list of conditions that will lead to a revision of the growth policy; and
 - c) a timetable for reviewing the growth policy at least once every 5 years and revising the policy if necessary
7. A statement of how the governing bodies will coordinate and cooperate
8. A statement explaining how the governing bodies will define the criteria for reviewing subdivisions; evaluate and make decisions regarding proposed subdivisions with respect to the criteria; and a statement explaining how public hearings regarding proposed subdivisions will be conducted.

A growth policy may:

1. Include one or more neighborhood plans. A neighborhood plan must be consistent with the growth policy.
2. Establish minimum criteria defining the jurisdictional area for a neighborhood plan.
3. Address the criteria to evaluate the effect of subdivision on the subdivision review criteria, describe zoning regulations that will be implemented to address the criteria, and identify geographic areas where the governing body intends to authorize an exemption from review of the criteria for proposed subdivisions.

¹ 76-1-601 et. seq., MCA